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ABSTRACT

There is a clear need in our country today for early education programs aimed at accelerating the cognitive development of disadvantaged children. Another need is for centers to care for the children of working mothers. Our traditional nursery schools have deemphasized early cognitive development while day care programs have been focused on deprived children and inadequate parents. There are some marginally successful compensatory preschool programs under Head Start impetus, but these programs have little in common with conventional preschool education. The popular conceptions of preschool education and day care have little to do with meeting the child's cognitive needs or his mother's need for self-esteem. What we need today is a new program design that combines temporal flexibility with known effective child care and educational practices. It is recommended that these new blends of early education and child care be developed to avoid identification with indigence and maternal ineptness. Those programs should provide incentives for mothers to become involved so that through training, they achieve self determination. It is further recommended that researchers be funded to continue to search for the most effective techniques of early education. (MH)

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Views on Pre-School Education and Day Care

Nancy McCormick Rambusch

Pre-school education in America developed historically within a middle class context. The parent co-operative nursery movement of the 1920's, the many university based programs in Departments of Home Economics and Psychology and the Montessori movement of the 1960's all drew children from educated articulate parents who were critical consumers. In most nursery school settings the teacher and the parents shared common assumptions about child growth and behavior. In any case, child attendance and sustained parental support were voluntary. In those states in which kindergarten was available (about 50% in 1964), kindergarten came to be seen gradually as a formal, social preparation for the first grade.

Since the prevalent attitudes about child growth and development before the end of World War II supported the notion of the child growing principally from the "inside out" rather than the "outside in", educational attempts to intervene actively in the child's early growth, were seen as a parental prerogative, - "all right if you liked that sort of thing". It could be argued that the middle class nursery school in its 40 year history (up to the 1965 Elementary and Secondary education act) focussed on a psycho-analytic view of the child which granted primacy to his early emotional growth and deemphasized the importance of his early cognitive growth. Since the middle class child population of the nursery school was an achieving one, the need to explore further the roots of early cognition may have seemed irrelevant. However, by the mid 1960's, the psychological conception of man's nature and his development which had obtained since the turn of the century, were in the process of changing.1

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With the advent of Head Start, the pedagogical model for early education readiest to the hand was the middle class nursery school. The Health, Nutritional and Community Involvement aspects of Head Start were, of course, unique. Many of the first teachers who taught in the Head Start programs had been trained for middle class nursery school, for kindergarten or for the early elementary grades. Aside from focus on self-image, the Head Start programs focussed on the development of experiences and skills which were relevant to later school and life success. A great deal of research into specific pedaoggical strategies emerged during the Head Start period.

New York State initiated a study (which predated Head Start and in which I was privileged to participate) which studied the effects of year long pre-kindergarten programs for disadvantaged children, from July 1965 to July 1969. The study focussed on factors which the schools believed were important and constituted the major objectives of their programs: intelligence, language, self-concept and physical development. Some recommendations of the study were - that pre-kindergarten classes which had the"cognitive language" focus, should resemble a modified kindergarten of first grade rather than a modified nursery class, and that primary grade teachers given special training, rather than nursery teachers given special training would function in greater accord leading to educational compensation goals. 2

While making no attempt to generalize from one study, one could submit that many of the features which are most distinctive in the middle class nursery school, such as informal rather than formal learning focus on emotional growth over cognitive growth, are of less apparent value to the

disadvantaged children whose "dropped developmental stitches" such programs are attempting to pick up than to middle class children. Much of the Head Start effort deriving from the middle class nursery model, appears to be pedagogically insignificant. Other programs involving Head Start populations, the Bereiter Engelmann program at the University of Illinois, the Nimnicht program at Greeley, Colorado, would support this contention.

Day Care comes from a different tradition than pre-school education. Day Care began in New York in 1845 for children of working mothers who could provide no other care for them. Its initial purposes were purely custodial.

Group day care, like institutional care, was thought of as unnatural for the child and hence special attention was to be paid to his adjustment. His mother, unlike the nursery school mother, was likewise an object of concern. Florence Ruderman suggests that"because the working mother was in the past, often without a husband, destitute and resourceless, it has also been assumed that special attention must be paid to the family's or the mother's - social and emotional problems, her possible conflicts in regard to her role, her relations to her child and her attitude toward the center, which in a sense supplants her". 3

The notion that mothers who confide their children to day care programs are somehow unable to function adequately still permeates the day care definition. Unlike a more recent view that group care, even for infants is a complementary, not a substitute maternal function, the image evoked by day care is one of broken and disrupted families, inept mothers and imperilled children. In social work writings on day care, the focus is repeatedly on

deprived children and inadequate parents. "Child Welfare Services are social services for the troubled children and children in trouble", we are told. 4 This view of day care is in need of radical revision.

The attitude that the delegation of part of child rearing to others is necessarily associated with some impairment of parental ability to fulfill the child rearing role, is no longer a tenable one (except perhaps in bureaucratic circles where the "welfare" mentality obtains). An enormous change in maternal attitude and option has been developing in the past decade. Women with young children have been returning to work in droves, and do not perceive their child rearing roles as necessarily imperilled by so doing. Though these mothers return to the world of work without guilt, they do not return without anxiety, since the informal child care arrangements which were common a decade ago, relatives, friends and paid baby sitters, seem to be evaporating.

To meet the need of young mothers who wish to return to work, to be trained for work, or to discharge other responsibilities more adequately. The linking of pre-school education and day care is no answer.

Day care has a bad odor; it always has had. Todays young mothers refuse to see themselves as the inert clay upon which a social workers itchy fingers will make an impress.

What is needed is a new program design which combines temporal flexibility with known effective child care and educational practices. Such a program probably also needs a new name.

Obvious examples for such programs come from Israel and Russia, a striking past example from Italy, in Maria Montessoris "Childrens House"- which she perceived as a child care facility acting, for the mother, in a situation which was a vestibule between the little world of family and the larger world of life, with the in-built expectations of the latter. Millions of American mothers of young children work. The notion that all mothers who bear children can and will automatically rear them is changing in favor of a notion of motherhood in which child bearing and child rearing are separable.

A program of modular educare, in which for variable periods of time, dictated by the mother's needs, a young child could be cared for at the same time and place as he is being "educated" appears to be a worthwhile model to explore.

When a mother is satisified that her needs are being met through the provision of adequate care for her young children, she will be capable of becoming a more effective mother. Reduction of maternal anxiety will improve the quality of child life automatically. The punitive attitude of welfare legislation toward the mother of young children exacerbates the mother's view of her self as only a mother and hence a person unable to break out of this definition to enter the world of work. The model for modular educare should not be the school. despite the need for trained people to instruct young children in specific skills. English "open education", with its emphasis on environmental organization of learning opportunities, first hand experiences with materials, practice and exploration to ones own criterion of sucess in a warm and accepting language-rich envrionment

offers possibilities for a model. 5 This is not a self-contained classroom in which children are thought of as a class, with 1 or 2 adults, but a cluster of several groups of children of mixed ages together with adults, men and women of various ages and backgrounds, in a designed physical space in which many more opportunities for activity can be offered a child because there is no reduplication of materials and there is lots of child time. Maria Montessori posited the importance of long uninterrupted stretches of time available to children, in which they could undertake such elaborate routines as setting a table, serving lunch and cleaning up. (An enterprise which took 1½ hours at the New York Foundling, with 3 year olds), in order for children to feel unhurried.

If a new institutional form of child life can emerge which combines the best insights of early education in a supportive and stimulating extra familial setting for long periods of time, new people will need to be recruited for this enterprise. Some will need to be competent at environmental organization, keeping the physical space organized for many simultaneous activities, and instruction; others will need to be trained in the specifics of language development and quantitative thinking; others will need to be observors of children, and others will need to be uncritically accepting of children's behavior. Grandfathers, high school dropouts, teachers, nurses and mothers will be valuable adults in this setting, if their orientation to it is like that of the middle class, sassy, critical and articulate parent supporters of nursery education, voluntary.

Not only State Departments of Education should be granted access to funds for creating new programs, but State Departments of Health which regulate

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at present existing Day Care facilities, as well as other public and private groups with demonstrable competence. Funds need to be allocated for the consolidation of existing information on effective early interventions, and on effective program models, wherever they may exist.

Funds need to be allocated for the design of "open" physical environments for young children which go well beyond the church basement model of Head Start.

Funds need to be allocated for research into the personal qualities which produce either "genius" mothers or exceptionally effective child oriented adults.

In summary, I would like to make the following points:

1) The most sucessful compensatory pre-school programs do not appear to have much in common with conventional pre-school education. These programs under Head Start impetus tended to be thought pf as isolates and competitive with each other. They can be considered as however seperable pedagogical components in a larger context.
2) The linking of "pre-school education" as popularly understood to "day care" as popularly understood risks meeting neither the child's cognitive needs nor his mother's need for self-esteem.
3) A amalgam of early education and child care is clearly needed and ought to derive from present knowledge of effective child care practices here and abroad, as well as the most effective pedagogical strategies presently known.

Therefore I recommend that:

1) A new blend of early education and child care be developed free of the negative image of "day care" and called something else, (such as <u>educare</u>) in order to avoid identification with indigence and maternal ineptness and that such a program provide incentives for mothers to become involved so that through training, they achieve self determination.

2) That research funds be allocated to determine the most effective early educational programs, as they emerge and subsequent dissemination funds be allocated to bring knowledge of such programs to the local level so that community participants will have a choice of possible instructional alternatives.

Notes

1) J. McVicker Hunt lists 6 of the changing beliefs with which psychological theoreticians were dealing in "their" pre-change form:

   1) A belief in fixed Intellegence
   2) A belief in pre-determined development
   3) A belief in a fixed and static, telephone switchboard notion of brain function
   4) A belief that experience during the early years and particularly before the development of speech is unimportant
   5) A belief that whatever experience does affect development is a matter of emotional reactions based on the fate of instinctual needs
   6) A belief that learning must be motivated by homeo static need, by painful elimatation and by acquired drives based on these

   "The Psychological Basis For Using Pre-School Enrichment As An Antidote For Cultural Deprivation" in The Challenge of Incompetence and Poverty, University of Illinois:urbana, 1969, pp.2-3.

2) deLorenzo, Louis T. Prekindergarten Programs For Educationally Disadvantaged Children, U.S. Department of Health.

3) Ruderman, Florence A. Child Care And Working Mothers, Child Welfare League of America: New York, 1968, p.11.

4) Child Welfare Services, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963, Unpaginated

5) Central to the English idea of open education are the following propositions:

   1) Long-term involvement with direct experience necessarily precedes abstract conceptualization about that experience
   2) "direct experience" for young children generally constitutes tactile engagement with manipulative materials
   3) Formulating concepts, testing them against the surrounding environment and finally assimilating them into one's overall framework is neither a sudden process nor a final, irreversible act
   4) faced with experience that contradicts one's present understanding, one either dismisses the experience or, should it (or the memory of it) persist, amends the hitherto satisfactory conceptualization
   5) Healthy cognitive growth requires certain psycho-emotional conditions; the absence of these conditions inhibits that growth
   6) it is natural and normal for a mind to seek out and explore the surrounding environment: only when threatened or when faced with a drab or unresponsive environment does a mind withdraw from active engagement

7) learning requires and is an activity: it requires action as well as reaction
8) The dangers of premature conceptualization based upon inadequate direct experience are considerable; one of the chief dangers is that the child will learn to rely on something outside himself during the conceptualization process
9) No one can fully know what abstract concept will be learned from any particular direct experience, not even trained adult teachers
10) No one's motive for attending to a particular direct experience nor one's motive for working out (or refining) a particular concept can be accurately ascertained by anyone else..

Rathbone, Charles H. Open Education and Teacher Training, Special Qualifying Paper, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University 1968, pp.5-6.